UL ENGAGE
Community Briefing

Pay It Forward Limerick

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THE BRIEF

Project Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of this project is to assist Pay It Forward Limerick (PIFL) in spreading their message to be kind, live kindly, and share kindness. We organised events at the University of Limerick with the aim to extend their reach to students and document the progress of their school Kindness Flag program; describing its founding, current ongoings, and future plans.

Project Rationale

We undertook this project to help spread kindness in and around Limerick City. It benefits the community by increasing awareness of a local non-profit organisation and their message. To create a culture of kindness, it is necessary to reach out to all age and occupation groups across Limerick. This is why we specifically focused on spreading their message among students, a part of the population that PIFL rarely gets to as most of their campaigns take place in town, away from the UL campus. Additionally, by spreading and promoting kindness, we are hoping to help to improve mental health and happiness all together and create a culture of community altruism.

COMMUNITY

Overview of Community Organisation

Pay It Forward Limerick is a non-profit, charitable organization that started in 2011 in Limerick, Ireland. It is made up of a group of approximately 6 volunteers of all different professions who all seek to promote the same message: be kind, live kindly, and spread kindness. This organisation believes that everyone has goodness within them and wants to encourage citizens of Limerick and beyond to express themselves through acts of altruism. This organisation works to provide positivity in the face of today's hate, inequality, and division. Pay It Forward hosts a variety of events to promote their mission, including the annual Festival of Kindness held in the Limerick City Center, and administers the Kindness Flag Program at numerous schools in the Limerick Area.

Community Partners

Michael O'Mahony

I was born and raised in Limerick, and a proud Limerick man, and maybe that is part of my involvement in Pay It Forward as well - we don't have enough pride in Limerick, and I want to change something about that. I was one of the founder members of Pay It Forward, and I am chairperson at the moment. For me, the most rewarding part of working with Pay It Forward is the joy that is spread and to see it grow. You tickle the kindness in the people, and they get excited, and that again excites me.

Before Pay It Forward was founded, I studied Managing Voluntary Organisations and worked for St. Vincent De Paul for a few years before becoming a psychotherapist. I had my own practice for a while, and for the past 17 years, I have worked two days of the week there and three days in the counselling department at UL. Concerning my free time, I love all sports, especially soccer, and I enjoy walking.

STUDENTS

Angela Giliberto – Roger Williams University, United States
I am an Educational Studies major and Psychology minor at Roger Williams University in Bristol, RI. I hope to work in an elementary school as either a special education teacher or guidance counsellor one day. For the time being, I am a member of my home university's dance team. During my time at UL I have enjoyed being a part of the Outdoor Pursuit Club and International Society.

Austin Schwartz – Pacific University, United States
I am a Business Administration major focusing on Finance, with a minor in Environmental Sustainability. In addition, I play American Football and Rugby for Pacific University.

Kathrin Moebius - Friedrich Schiller Universitaet Jena, Germany
Studying psychology as a major, I am in my second ERASMUS semester here at University of Limerick. I am really enjoying my time inside and outside of college here, playing Ultimate Frisbee and being part of the Outdoor Pursuits Club, the International Society and the Environmental Society.

Rachel Zeigler - University of South Carolina, United States
I am a second year Pre-PA Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Major, Economics Minor. I enjoy being a member of the Outdoor Pursuits Club, International Society, and Kayak Club. I hope to one day work in Pediatric Oncology, and to continue my lifelong interest in service learning.

OUTCOMES

The mission of Pay It Forward Limerick is to promote a culture of kindness, facilitating acts of altruism in everyday settings. Through the International Practicum, our team was able to promote their mission through volunteer efforts. Below are the initiatives that we supported:

UL Day of Kindness

Our team wanted reach out to the large population of students in Limerick. To target the student population, we organised the inaugural University of Limerick Day of Kindness. This event took place on March 8th 12-4pm in the UL Student Union Courtyard. It spread the Pay It Forward message using various initiatives to encourage random acts of kindness amongst students and staff. Our team set up a large tent that provided a central location for the event's ongoings. The tent allowed us to hand out free baked goods, distribute compliments, and play upbeat music. The organized flash mob took place in front of the tent with 24 dancers performing to uplifting lyrics. Many volunteers from various student organizations helped with the free hug campaign, spreading out across campus to give students a warm, friendly gesture. In addition, the event raised awareness for the Festival of Kindness that took place in the Limerick City Center starting March 10th. In the morning, we put more than 200 sweets on the desks in the library with a message attached to them telling people to pass on that random act of kindness. Lastly, our team went to the Plaza Cafe, approached all tables and asked customers to join us into a round of applause for the staff. Cards were distributed at each event with the message encouraging audience members to pass on the act of kindness.

To evaluate our efforts for the Day of Kindness, we conducted an online survey, inviting all the participants we had been in direct contact with to take part. Fourteen volunteers responded (Figure 1). We asked the participants on how their awareness of Pay It Forward mission changed on a scale from 1 (did not change) to 5 (changed significantly). Mean value 4.5 suggests a high increase of participant's awareness (see Figure 2). We also asked participants to rate the

Figure 1. Distribution of survey participants in the initiatives taking place on the UL Day of Kindness

likeliness of future involvement carrying out random acts of kindness on a scale from 1 (not likely) to 5 (very likely). Results are displayed in Figure 3 and suggest that most participants will very likely perform random acts of kindness in the future, indicating that our efforts to help PIFL spread kindness were successful.
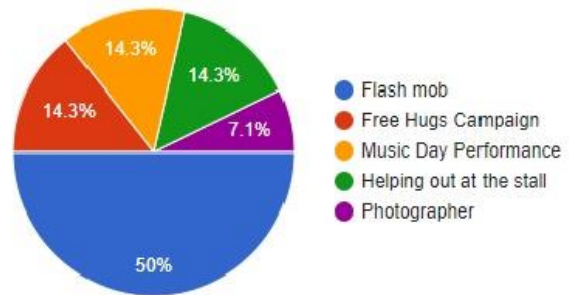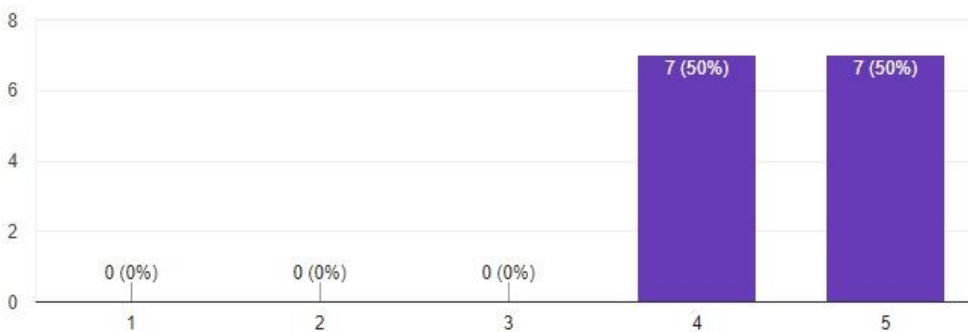

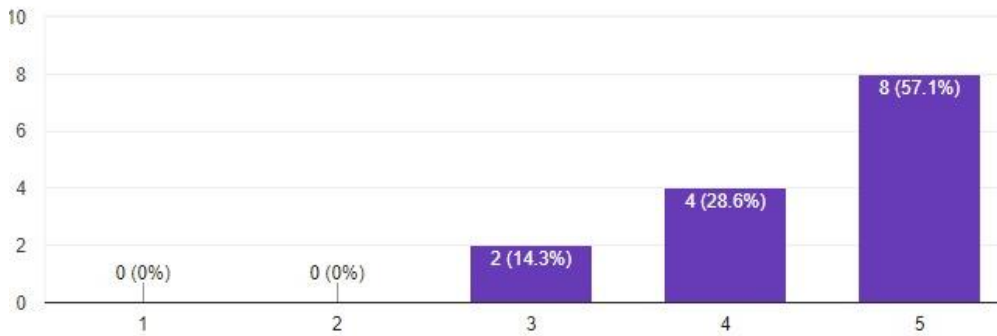Figure 2. Respondents' answers to the question how much their awareness of PIFL's mission has increased

Figure 3. Respondents' answers to the question how likely they are to carry out acts of kindness in the future.

Festival of Kindness & UL Music Day

Throughout the week of March 10th, our team supported the events of the annual Festival of Kindness taking place in the Limerick City Centre. We volunteered at the Family Fun Day tents, distributed posters promoting the festival and helped giving out flowers to people passing by. On campus for the fifth of the Festival of Kindness, we organised a Music Day at UL to mirror the event taking place throughout venues in the city. We set up two venues on campus, Red Raisin Cafe and the Cube Cafe, and asked students to come and share their musical talents with us. Student volunteers played fiddle and guitar in these locations.

Kindness Flag Project

As a semester-long project, we documented the history and progress of the Kindness Flag Project at local schools. Our team visited two schools at different stages in the Kindness Flag projects and asked them about their experience and descriptions of steps taken to earn their Kindness Flag designation. In addition, we met with Community Members who contributed to the Kindness Flag previously or presently to gather information. Members of our practicum team consolidated testimonials and details about the schools' participation in designing a brochure to represent the Kindness Flag program and to market the initiative to additional schools in the future.

TESTIMONIALS

This section contains quotes from Michael O'Mahony, the community partner we most closely worked together with, on his experiences of working and learning with us on this project.

What has our involvement meant to you and Pay It Forward? How have the outcomes impacted on you and the community?

> "You got a whole group of people to know about Pay It Forward"

> "When I showed them [the PIFL committee] the video, and the pictures of the free hugs,... they were like 'Oh my god, brilliant, brilliant'. It inspired us more, it encouraged us more. You brought in energy that we needed."

> "You were right within the spirit of what we wanted to do. You got it in one. You didn't talk about it, you lived it. Often people learn the language, and they say things, but they actually don't integrate into their own lives. You actually integrated it into your own soul. For me, that was the most important thing"

> "You are now ambassadors of kindness."

> "You brought people in, and those people now have a very positive experience of UL, of Limerick, of the kindness in Limerick. I think that's massive."

> "You inspired other people!"

What is your learning experience from working with us?

> "What you've done has confirmed what we believe - it's not all about social media. It's not about recruiting by writing emails. It's about personal contact. [...] So it was a great learning for us: You're in a generation of social media [...], and it rarely works like that. [...] So what you confirmed was - the values we're holding true to, you bought into them. [...] You made it personal. You got the concept. We didn't ask you, we didn't tell you to do it the old fashioned way, but you did it anyway. [...] You've done what we're doing. And my learning is - it's really about the personal contact, even in your generation. [...] I'm thrilled young people went that way, took that route."

> "People come and ask if they can help, people are kind. You confirmed that around your age group - third level students from different backgrounds, different countries, different upbringings. It's still the same. That was a massive boost for us, a massive confirmation. That was great learning for us."

RECOMMENDATIONS

For our Community Partner:

- Provide specific information about the region, i.e. the City of Limerick, so that adequate venues are able to be utilized
- Include contacts that have helped the organization previously and information about what role played/what they contributed
- Be explicit about the goals of the organization and specify goals the Community Partner has for the practicum team over the semester
- Communicate feedback about our progress, events, etc.

For future students:

- Create and update Google Docs with contacts/plans/ideas/documents so that all team members may collaborate simultaneously
- Make sure you have clear, specific objectives for meetings with Community Partner members
- Use your connections and friends if you need volunteers or assistance in carrying out events
- Utilize personal messaging, rather than email, or approach people face-to-face so that you are able to receive direct responses
- Contact the University of Limerick Student Union for bookings at least 3 weeks in advance. Be specific about what equipment your team needs (number of tables, tent, etc.)
- Lunchtime in Ireland in most cases means 1pm.
- Contact Music Society for speaker/equipment rental, as they provide assistance and rental free of charge. Be specific about what equipment your team needs (Number of speakers, AUX cord, etc.)
- Communicate with the Community Partner about obtaining necessary materials (logo t-shirts, leaflets, banners, etc.)

Recommendations from the Community Partner to future students:

- Bring in your own strengths and utilize these to the benefit of the practicum team
- Live the message of Pay It Forward Limerick and pass it on to others around you

GALLERY
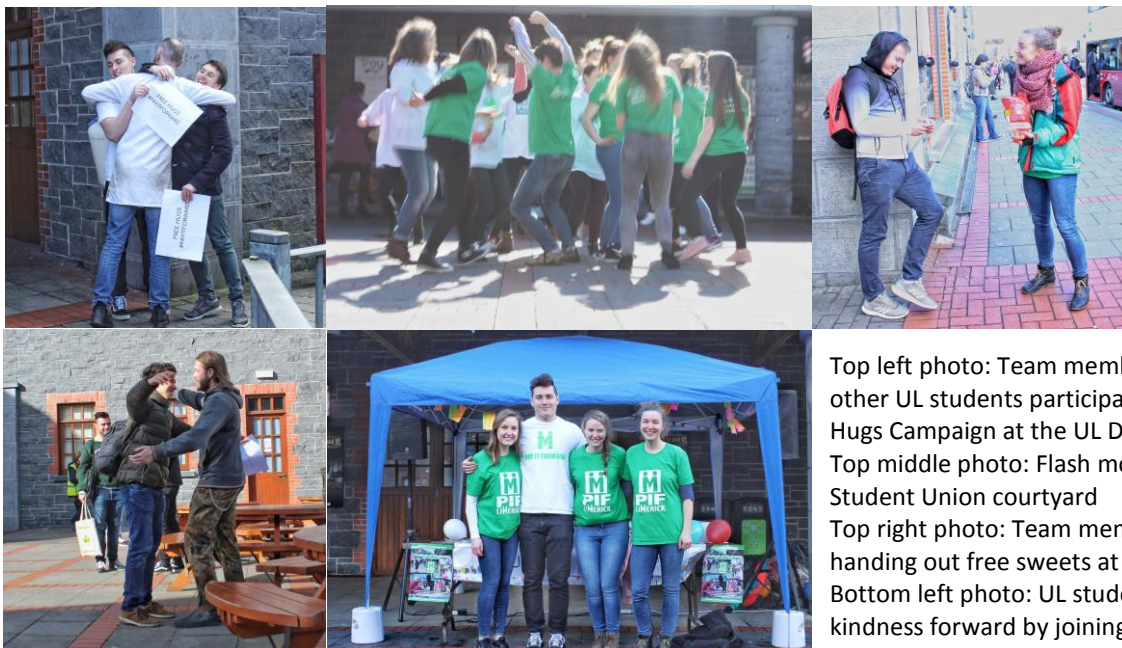
Top left photo: Team member, Austin, and other UL students participate in the Free Hugs Campaign at the UL Day of Kindness
Top middle photo: Flash mob in the UL Student Union courtyard
Top right photo: Team member, Kathrin, handing out free sweets at the UL bus stop
Bottom left photo: UL students paying kindness forward by joining in with the Free Hugs campaign
Bottom right photo: All group members, Rachel, Austin, Angela, and Kathrin, in front of our Day of Kindness tent

First Photo: UL student, Colum Sheehan, and team member, Angela, at the Cube Cafe enjoying UL's Music Day
Second Photo: UL student, Colum Sheehan, playing his guitar and singing for everyone enjoying their lunch break
Third Photo: UL international student, Autumn Lester, playing her fiddle at Red Raisins Cafe
Fourth Photo: UL student, Autumn Lester, and group member Kathrin enjoying the music

Top left photo: The flowers PIFL members and volunteers handed out on PIFL's Family Fun Day

Top right photo: Group member, Austin, handing out flowers in Limerick City

Bottom left photo: Four of PIFL committee members enjoying Family Fun Day

Bottom right photo: Families of Limerick making bracelets on Bedford Row

APPENDICES

PIFL's Festival of Kindness schedule

PIFL's business cards

Pay It Forward Experience Questionnaire:

1. What part of the project were you involved in?
2. How was your experience?
3. Based on your experience, how did your awareness of Pay It Forward Limerick's mission change?
4. Based on your experience, how likely are you to do random acts of kindness in the future?
5. Please leave a comment on what you think about the whole project of a Day of Kindness/Music Day at UL.
6. Please tell us in your own words what the experience of participating in the Day of Kindness or Music Day was like for you.

Schools Programme Brochure

THE KINDNESS FLAG

PAY IT FORWARD LIMERICK SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

Be Kind Live Kindly & Share Kindness

FUTURE

The programme has seen enormous success. Increasing numbers of schools from different areas are interested in joining the kindness movement spearheaded by PIFL. Primary, secondary schools, preschools, and crèches are involved in earning a Kindness Flag . Within the university setting, PIFL hopes to open the programme to specific adacemic departments to reach an older cohort.

The objective of the Kindness Flag Programme is to allow schools to collaborate and share their experiences among each other. PIFL encourages and supports schools to create a network of kindness.

GET INVOLVED

Pay It Forward Limerick encourages additional schools to join the Kindness Flag Programme.

Contact us:

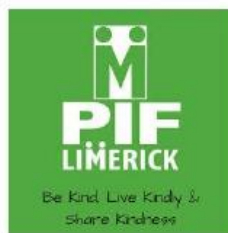piflimerick@gmail.com

www.pifl.ie

Facebook: Pay it Forward Limerick

Twitter: PIF_Limerick

Instagram: pif_limerick

How it started

Where it is

Where it is heading

Be Kind Live Kindly & Share Kindness

OVERVIEW

Pay It Forward Limerick (PIFL) is an organisation based in Limerick, Ireland promoting a culture of kindness and altruism. We hope to encourage others to perform random acts of kindness, paying it forward to the next person.

The purpose of the Kindness Flag Programme is to bring teachers and their students together to collaborate to create and implement ideas to support a culture of kindness in their respective schools. These initiatives are supported and overseen by a PIFL education commitee member. After paticipating in the programme for one year and completing tasks, such as drafting a kindness code and cooresponding action plan, schools are awarded the kindness flag.
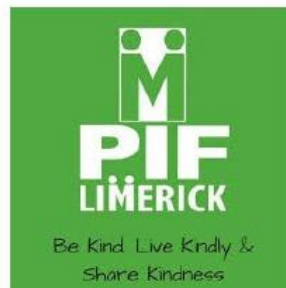
HOW IT STARTED

After our first year as an organisation, Pay It Forward Limerick began its mission to schools in order to reach a younger cohort.

One of the PIFL committee members was inspired to first implement the Kindness Flag Programme by his daughter who attended a secondary school in the Limerick area. The organisation utilized their connections with local teachers in order to install the Kindness Flag Programme. Transition Year students collaborated with our organisation and facilitated projects to promote kindness in their schools and surrounding communities. The idea expanded to the nearby secondary school St. Munchin's and the primary school Scoil Íde. The efforts and ideas of students are honoured by the awarding of the Kindness Flag. Since the founding of the programme, PIFL has seen an increase in participating schools.

PRESENT

Kindness Flag Schools in Cork, County Clare and Belfast are participating, have developed creative, unique ideas to promote kindness among students and teachers. Examples include a kindness week, YouTube videos, bulletin boards, secret buddies, posters with kindness quotes. In addition, students from Kindness Flag Schools constistently participate in the annual Festival of Kindness held in the city centre. Students enjoy the programme and are enthusiastic about the difference they are making. One student explained, 'Be kind not because you are told to be kind, but because being kind feels good.'

PIFL's Brochure

Why Pay It Forward?

It has become increasingly challenging to be psychologically and emotionally resilient in the midst of economic, social and health crises. Never so much has mental health, social support and a sense of belonging been so important to our community. Our collective response to this challenge in PIFL has been to promote positive mental health, kindness and social inclusivity.

Being kind to one another acknowledges our own capacity for kindness and also has the benefit of 'feeling good' for both giver and recipient. In promoting kindness we hope to change attitudes, build self-esteem and mental health resilience creating a sense of community cohesiveness.

There is an inherent goodness in people who carry out acts of kindness, compassion and support each day, often for friends or family and other times for complete strangers. If someone does you a good deed, instead of 'paying it back' why not pay it forward? You are essentially pledging a conscious act of kindness to another and creating a ripple effect.

Who We Are

PIFL is a community based, voluntary, charitable, non-profit organisation working to promote Limerick as a city of kindness through policy, education and community initiatives.

Our volunteers give of their time, talent, energy and resources freely. PIFL does not fundraise but relies on the kindness of patronage and philanthropy. PIFL is without personal, political or religious agenda.

POSTER
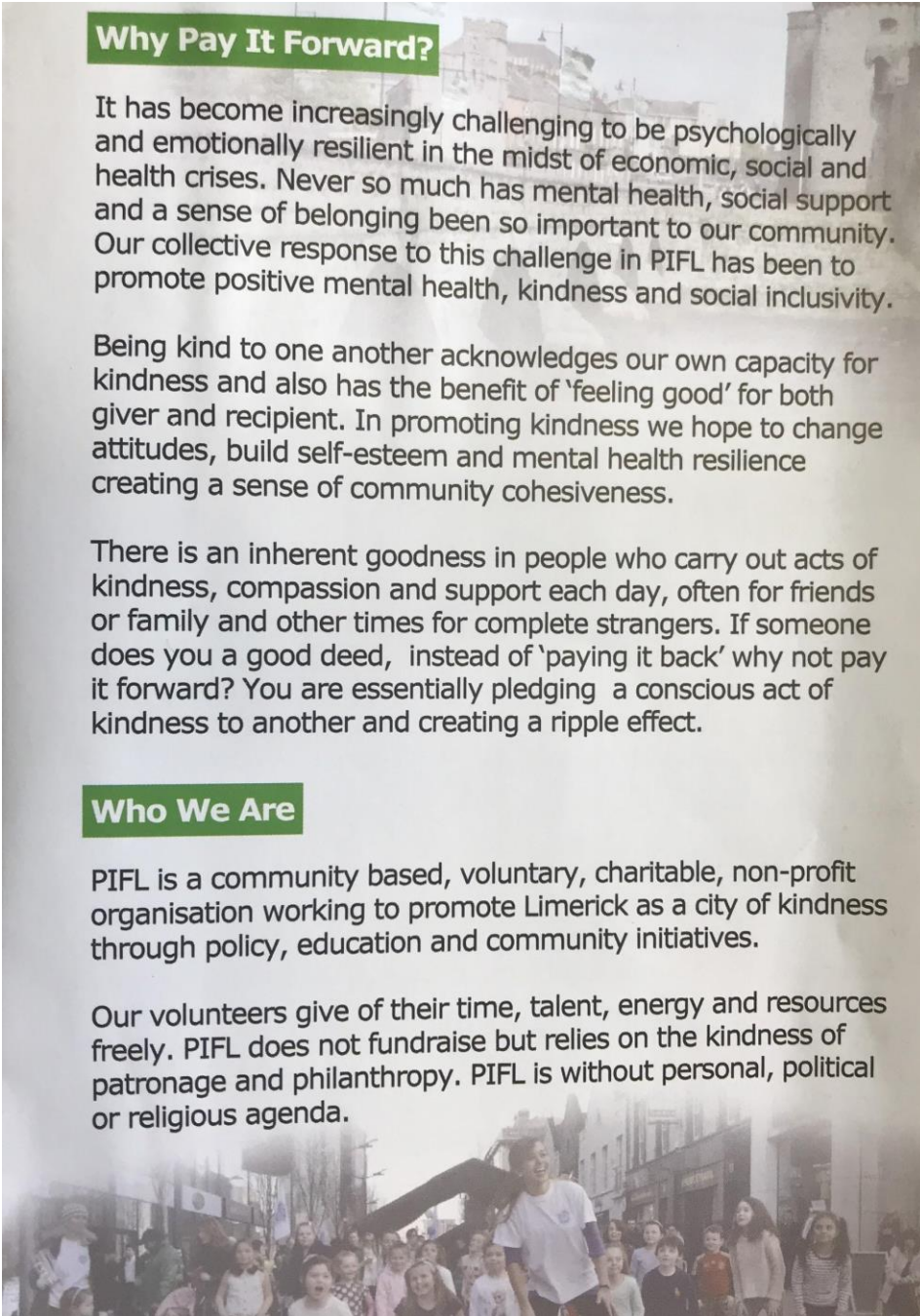
Pay It Forward Limerick – Promoting a Culture of Kindness

University of Limerick International Practicum Module BR4140

Angela Giliberto, Kathrin Möbius, Austin Schwartz and Rachel Zeigler

Introduction

Mental health is a topic of great importance because of its widespread effect on individuals, and therefore, society. Nearly half of the world's population is impacted by mental illness, experiencing negative impacts on their self esteem, relationships, and ability to function in everyday life. More specifically, the number of university students with a serious mental illness has risen significantly over the past few years (Storrie, et al., 2010). Pay It Limerick seeks to focus on promoting positive mental health, and we sought to carry out this mission in the City of Limerick and on the University of Limerick campus.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this project is to too assist Pay It Forward Limerick (PIFL) in spreading their message: be kind, live kindly, and share kindness. We organised events at the University of Limerick to extend the organization's mission to university students and faculty and to document the progress of the School Kindness Flag Programme. From founding to present day Additionally, we documented the progress of their school Kindness Flag program to facilitate the program's further expansion, as students who regularly carry out acts of kindness have been found to have higher levels of well being and peer acceptance (Layous, et al., 2012).

Interventions

- UL Day of Kindness
- Kindness Flag brochure
- UL Music Day
- Family Fun Day

All of these projects helped to promote Pay It Forward Limerick's mission in Limerick City and surrounding areas. The inaugural UL Day of Kindness was developed and implemented as an extension of the organisation's already existing initiatives. The Family Fun Day, part of the Festival of Kindness, and the UL Music Day were part of the Festival of Kindness that PIFL has been organising in town for the past five years.

Our involvement

Kindness Flag Programme
Our team produced a marketing brochure about Pay It Forward Limerick's Kindness Flag Programme for primary and secondary schools around Limerick.

Family Fun Day
First day of the festival of Kindness in Bedford Row, with face painting, free blood pressure examinations, dog petting, flowers given out...

UL Music Day
Student musicians played for free in various Red Raisins and Cube Café

UL Day of Kindness
Our team hosted a day to encourage random acts of kindness around campus. We distributed free treats in the courtyard, notes with compliments, sweets with messages on the library desk, Free Hugs campaign,flash mob, applause for staff in a café on campus.

Outcomes

On the UL Day of Kindness we gave out:
- Over 300 treats
- 150 Encouraging notes
- Countless Hugs

Student involvement included:
- 22 Flash mob dancers
- 7 Students giving out free bags
- 6 Students volunteering and distributing compliment cards at the stall

Other outcomes include:
- Students playing music on campus for the UL Music Day
- Production of a brochure for Pay It Forward Limerick's Kindness Flag Programme
- Many videos and photos for Pay It Forward Limerick's promotional video

Evaluation

To evaluate our efforts in the Day of Kindness and UL Music Day, a survey was conducted. Participants responded:

- 100% of the participants indicated they were now more aware of Pay It Forward Limerick's mission than before the initiative.
- 85.6% indicated they are likely or very likely to carry out random acts of kindness in the future.
- Participants included comments about the events they participated in: "felt my whole mood for the day brighten", "it was a rewarding experience", "it really made a difference".

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the PIFL committee, especially Michael, Annalise, Mary and Siobhan, for their support and enthusiasm. Thank you to Bernie Quilinan, Sam Porteus, and Tracey Gleeson for your instruction and guidance. Thank you to all our volunteers involved in our projects for making our involvements and events successful.

References

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